



***Statement of Phil Schultz, Fox Point, Chair, Olmsted Network
Supporting Designation of Washington Park as a Milwaukee County Landmark
10-15-2023***

I am Phil Schultz, a native of Fox Point and national chair of the Olmsted Network. The Network, founded in 1980, is the first and only national organization dedicated to championing Olmsted parks and places through advocacy, education and stewardship. Our board includes Wyman Winston from Cudahy, WI, and our Bicentennial Honorary Committee included the late Herbert Kohler. I am here tonight to offer our wholehearted support for the designation of Washington Park as a Milwaukee County landmark.

This designation is a critical first step to acknowledging the Park's national significance. It is also a critical first step in telling the world about the rich Olmsted resources available in this county and this great state.

Olmsted and the Olmsted firm are regularly associated with New York City and the East Coast, leaving their significant work in the Midwest underappreciated. While Lake Park is designated on the national historic register, other significant Olmsted landscapes like Washington Park—go unnoticed.

To showcase Milwaukee's rich Olmsted heritage, the Olmsted Network was pleased to gather just last month in this county for our national conference. During the Olmsted Bicentennial in 2022, we worked with county and state partners who hosted prominent museum exhibits, spirited community conversations, park tours, and birthday celebrations. We testified on behalf of naming the Olmsted Way in Washington Park. And we have already added Washington Park to our national Olmsted Trail, which can be found on our website, olmsted.org.

Washington Park on the city's westside is literally Milwaukee's Central Park. It was designed by famed landscape architect and social reformer, Frederick Law Olmsted, who first created Central Park, and then refined and adapted his visionary design principles for the creation of Lake, Washington and Riverside Parks and Newberry Boulevard in Milwaukee.

Olmsted and the Olmsted firm selected and emphasized the contours of the park; chose the trees and plantings; sculpted the lagoons and ponds; and created the circulation systems. They set out a plan for the park with a vision that would be realized long after they were gone.

That vision was founded on social justice principles that are as important now as they were then:

- parks serve a crucial role in a democracy – offering democratic spaces where people of all backgrounds can come together – to see and be seen and to connect through the restorative power of nature.
- parks provide a green sponge, offering ecological services that are needed more than ever in the face of climate change.
- parks advance mental and physical well being by connecting city dwellers with nature.

Over its history, Washington Park has served Milwaukee residents and visitors in all of these ways. It has been a key part of Milwaukee's history— as historian Virginia Small has [eloquently chronicled](#). But it has also been subject to devastating developments— such as freeway 175— which removed nearly 10% of the parkland and diminished the value and power of the park design.

As the city, county and state consider new plans for this park, understanding and recognizing the park's important history are urgent. We know that Central Park and other Olmsted parks in Buffalo, Louisville, Rochester and Boston have financially benefited from historic designation, finding it easier to attract visitors, grant dollars and tax incentives. These parks are vibrant urban places, where innovative programming occurs.

In no uncertain terms, Washington Park has played a transformative role in the history of this county – offering a park for all people – a place for rest and contemplation as well as a variety of recreational opportunities.

Designating the park a county landmark can help ensure that Olmsted's important work continues to inspire and benefit Milwaukee community leaders, planners and the next generation. It can also be an important first step towards recognizing this great park as the local and, indeed, national treasure it is.

The Olmsted Network is the first and only national champion of Olmsted parks and places through advocacy, education and stewardship. Our partners are international and include Birkenhead Park in Liverpool, Central Park, Boston's Emerald Necklace, Chicago's Midway Plaisance, Stanford University, Biltmore and Bok Tower Gardens.

